

Washington, DC – U.S. Congressman Ciro D. Rodriguez (TX-23) announced Tuesday the passage of a bill that will transform the way the Department of Veterans Affairs is able to respond to the medical needs of veterans.

The Veterans Health Care Budget Reform and Transparency Act of 2009, co-sponsored by Rodriguez, will allocate VA funding on a two-year cycle, rather than for just the upcoming fiscal year. For example, when the VA considers funding for FY 11, the agency will allocate funds for both FY 11 and FY 12. Because the VA will know how much money is available in upcoming years, it can plan more effectively for medical services and reduce delays in delivery of much-needed programs to veterans.

“As we prepare to honor our nation’s heroes on Independence Day, we remember all they’ve sacrificed. But for years, those same veterans have had to sacrifice even more, waiting for the federal budget process to fund the critical services they need,” said Congressman Rodriguez. “We’ve heard that message loud and clear, and this bill means a more efficient and responsive system for our vets.”

House Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Bob Filner called the bill “among the most important for veterans and their families” considered this year. Specifically, it provides advance appropriations authority for five medical care accounts of the Veterans Health Administration for two years, beginning in FY 11, including medical services, medical support and compliance, and medical facilities.

The bill requires the Government Accountability Office to study the adequacy and accuracy of the budget projections for the fiscal year involved and the subsequent four fiscal years and requires an annual report from the VA to Congress by July 31 each year detailing cost estimates.

Rodriguez also co-sponsored H.R. 1211, which passed Tuesday. The Women Veterans Health Care Improvement Act expands health care for women veterans, especially those serving in Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. It calls for research into the barriers facing women veterans who seek health care, medical care for newborn children of women veterans, and enhancement of sexual trauma programs and PTSD treatment for women.

Other measures passed Tuesday include:

H.R. 1172, directing the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to include on the VA Website a list of organizations that provide scholarships to veterans and their survivors;

S. 407, the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2009, increasing the rates of veterans' disability compensation by the same percentage as Social Security benefits increases, effective Dec. 1, 2009;

H.R. 1037 to conduct a five-year pilot project testing the feasibility of expanding the scope of certain qualifying work-study activities;

H.R. 2180 to waive housing loan fees for certain veterans with service-connected disabilities called to active service.

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